

4701 WILLARD AVENUE, CHEVY CHASE, MARYLAND 20015 656-4068

FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

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SUBJECT Challenge

MARGARET SOMMERS: Old CIA agents never die, they just keep popping up in spy novels and intelligence magazines. However, some former agents have formed an action group called Challenge, to stop that kind of publicity.

Marge Halperin gives us more.

MARGE HALPERIN: The CIA's former Latin American chief David Phillips started the group Challenge, after he read some unflattering things about himself.

DAVID PHILLIPS: The book entitled "Conspiracy" suggested to the reader that I might have been Lee Harvey Oswald's case officer. And then also four gentlemen gave a press conference in which they flatly charged that I had something to do with the assassination of Orlando Letelier, the former Chilean Foreign Minister here in Washington in 1976.

HALPERIN: Phillips denies both charges and he started to look for ways to fight back. In just a year he signed up some 3,000 former and present intelligence agents for his Challenge group, and they are ready to file their first lawsuit. It will be against two Washington publications that specialize in exposing undercover CIA agents working abroad.

PHILLIPS: We consider it political mischief of the worst type, and we certainly know that the identification of these American operatives abroad causes them risks and certainly violates the privacy of their families and that sort of thing.

HALPERIN: Phillips has discovered those magazines don't break any laws, but Challenge is working up a class action libel

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